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Leslie Blatteau

President, New Haven Federation of Teachers

General Comments: HB-6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the Governor's proposed budget for childcare and public education. My name is Leslie Blatteau and I am a parent, teacher, and resident in New Haven. I am the President of the New Haven Federation of Teachers, a union representing over 1700 educators in New Haven Public Schools. I am also an At-Large Vice President of AFT-CT, a 30,000 member strong statewide union representing 10,000 teachers and educators in Connecticut. Both NHFT and AFT-CT belong to Recovery For All – a statewide coalition fighting for a better future for Connecticut, bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations. We face a historic opportunity THIS YEAR to fully fund childcare and our pre-K-12 public schools, but the governor's budget does not meet the moment. Connecticut, as the wealthiest state in the country, should be a state where every child can thrive and learn.

Given the current issues we face in public schools throughout our state, specifically the educator/paraprofessional shortage and the increase in our students' academic, social, and emotional needs, it is concerning that the Governor's budget fails to fully fund public education. Because of underfunding, CT has approximately 1,300 unfilled paraeducator positions and 1,200 teacher vacancies (CSDE, Sept 2022). In this time of increased need in schools and classrooms, huge budget surpluses in Hartford, and the continued amassing of extreme wealth by Connecticut's corporations and billionaires, it is hard to believe the Governor is considering flat funding public education.

To put it simply, the Governor's budget does not go far enough to address the long term impact of Connecticut's inequitable system of school funding. At a minimum, the State of CT should

fully fund the Excess Cost Grant to ensure that our students' with special needs get the individualized attention they deserve and schools have the capacity to hire and retain certified staff to meet our students' needs. And at a minimum, the State of CT should fully fund the ECS formula this year to protect our students' most basic rights: the right to highly qualified teachers and paraeducators in their classrooms, as well as the right to special education and ELL services, which are not being provided because of the lack of funding and staffing.

Unfortunately, the Governor's proposed phase-in will perpetuate a reality in our state where some children will have access to an engaging, well-funded, and developmentally appropriate education designed to meet the needs of the whole child and others simply will not. And we know this disparity impacts our students of color, our low income students, our students with special needs, and our English language learners the most. Connecticut must do better. And I also must add that fully funding the ECS formula does not go far enough to fix the gaping inequality between rich school districts and poor school districts, but it is an important step.

On a personal note, I want to take a minute to celebrate my daughter's 2nd grade teacher - she started this year with 20 students and she built a warm, accepting, and structured community of diverse learners. Her energy and her creativity is boundless and my daughter literally skips into school every morning. However, since the school year started, the class size has gone from 20 to 26. And this brilliant teacher and her amazing students (who collectively speak English, Spanish, Pashto and Arabic) continue to make do without the resources that students in other CT towns, with class sizes that remain at 20, have. The same thing is happening at our large high schools in New Haven. While charter schools have a lottery and no new students will enter until the 23-24 school year begins, schools like Wilbur Cross High School welcome students every day, from everywhere, and educators work to support them academically, socially, and emotionally. This is why if there are any changes to the charter school funding formula, they must include accountability and transparency measures for charter schools as well.

We have a historic opportunity this session to make a course correction: fully fund our public schools to guarantee the highest quality public education for every student. This is not the time to turn our backs on CT's future. Please center equity and allocate the funding that our childcare and preK-12 public education systems deserve.

## **CHARTER SCHOOL TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY**

We ask the legislature to enact common sense measures:

**Sec. 1 – Parity in Special Education and SBE Accountability** – Makes special education statutes (10-76d – 10-76k) and SBE accountability (10-4b) statutes applicable to Charter Schools. (see also Secs. 6 & 14).

**Sec. 2 – Addressing pushouts of students** – Prevents charter school operators from pushing students out of a charter schools by mirroring similar language and intent in magnet school statutes.

**Sec. 3 – Student Exit Interviews – Addressing pushouts of students**

1. Requires charter school to conduct exit interviews of students/parents/guardians to determine whether the student has been pushed out or otherwise dissuaded from attending the charter school.
2. Requires SDE to create a reporting template and to report aggregate results for each school.
3. Requires SDE to create process for reports of unequal treatment by charter schools and steps to remediate concerns.

**Sec. 4 – Local Impact of New Charter Schools** – Requires approval of new charters to include an impact analysis of the school's operation on the local school district.

**Sec. 5 – End Special Waivers from Statute** – Phase out charter schools' waivers from statute, except existing enrollment cap waivers.

**Sec. 6 – Parity in Special Education, Transportation, and Other Budget Practices** –makes charter school responsible for special education and transportation costs of its students.

**Sec. 7 – Funds for Classrooms** – Prohibit use of public funds to advertise for charter school student recruitment.

**Sec. 8 – Equity in Student Waitlists and Admissions Lotteries** – Addresses barriers to equity by prohibiting practices like requiring parents to volunteer or attend school functions or to advise students against applying due to lack of resources to support special education or EL students.

**Sec. 9 – Student attrition** – Requires charter schools to submit data on the number of Special Education and ELs relative to the local school district and the number of students entering grade 9 who graduated four years later.

**Sec. 10 –Transparency in Student Enrollment** – Changes SDE biannual reporting on charter schools to include recommendations for legislation to promote oversight, transparency and accountability, prevent drop-out and attrition, reduce racial isolation. Adds to charter school profile reports trends toward reducing racial isolation, mobility, voluntary and involuntary exits, matched student cohort graduation rates, suspensions/expulsions, donors of donations in excess of \$1,000 per year.

**Sec. 11 – CMOs transparency** – Requires detailed reporting of charter schools' contracts with operators, including expenditures and associated costs.

**Sec. 12 – Public Meeting and Transparency –**

1. Requires online posting of charter school's handbook, discipline codes, policies, budgets, donations, advertising expenditures, CMO fees, contracts.
2. Requires fair and publicly posted disciplinary policy and code of conduct, including student due process rights, prohibitions against assessing of fines or demerits leading to suspensions or expulsions and against punitive measures that demean or humiliate students.

3. Requires for any student withdrawing from the school signed attestation indicating the reason for withdrawal and whether it was voluntary and whether school personnel discouraged the student from continued enrollment, with aggregate results reported to the state.
4. Requires charter schools to provide plain language descriptions of teachers' due process rights under CGS 10-151.

**Sec. 13 – FOIA and CMOs** – Extends FOI provisions to CMOs, including donor information unless a contributor requests his or her name be redacted (limited to 3 years from the year of the donation).

**Sec. 14 – SBE Accountability (10-4b)** – Specifically includes Charter School in Sec. 10-4b to ensure SBE accountability over charter schools.

**Sec. 15 – Certification parity** – Ends the provision permitting a school to open with up to 50% of its teachers without suitable certification. Reduces the percentage of non-certified teachers who can serve in roles requiring certification from 30% to 5%, provided they obtain a Charter School Teaching Permit.